

Dragonshards

The Khoravar: Half-Elves of Khorvaire

By Keith Baker



"Aerenal and Sarlona met in Khorvaire, and we are the fruit of that union. We may have no kings, no countries to call our own, but we are the true children of this land."

-- Arilam d'Lyrandar, captain of the airship *Bright Wind*

Almost 2,600 years ago, the nation of Aerenal was torn apart by civil war. Tensions between the clerics of the Undying Court and the necromancers of the House of Vol had grown with each new generation, but the manifestation of the Mark of Death and the discovery of half-dragons within the House of Vol were enough to set a spark to the bonfire. Soon the dragons of Argonnessen joined the fray, and when the conflict had settled, the line of Vol was no more.

The Aereni had engaged in many battles against the dragons but this was the first civil war in the nation's history, and it left deep scars on the psyche of the elves. In the aftermath of the conflict, a number of elves chose to leave Aerenal to seek a new future in the land of Khorvaire. The elves of House Phiarlan led this exodus; while the Sibling Kings and the Undying Court had taken no action against the Mark of Shadow, the destruction of the Mark of Death was unsettling. Most of the immigrants felt that an unspoken promise had been broken by the civil war and that the elven blood spilled on the soil of Aerenal forever tainted the land.

As the elves of House Phiarlan and the other scions of Aerenal spread across Khorvaire, they encountered the current occupants of the land: humans whose ancestors had traveled from Sarlona in search of riches and opportunity. The humans were fascinated by the elves. Many coveted the fey beauty and arcane secrets of the travelers, and many of the vagabond elves married into human guilds and noble families. Most elves saw this as a long-term investment. The elves were accustomed to looking centuries ahead, and having learned of the short human lifespan, an elven spouse had an excellent chance of inheriting control of family resources. Few elves imagined that they could conceive a child with a human until the first half-elves were born.

The Children of Khorvaire

Those elves that mingled with humans had typically married into privileged families, so that the first generation of half-elves was born with power and influence. For the most part, human parents were overjoyed with their unusual children, while elves saw the half-elves as pale reflections and mockeries of their ancestors. Many of the elves chose to back away from their human alliances and withdraw to the enclaves of House Phiarlan. If not for this desire to preserve their racial heritage, it is likely that the elves would have far greater influence across the modern nations of Khorvaire. Even as the true elves pulled back, the young half-elves spread across Khorvaire, embracing its many wonders. While they were bound to different houses and bloodlines, the majority felt a strong bond to other half-elves. Most sought to marry other half-elves, in the process forming new and stronger alliances between their families and guilds; this stability helped to lay the foundations of the Five Nations.

While most half-elves remained among their human ancestors, they clung to the language and some of the traditions of the distant elves. As their numbers grew and their blood ties to the elves grew more distant, they

developed their own traditions, eventually coming to seek a name beyond "half-elf." The most common is *Khoravar*. Like Valenar, this word is both an adjective and a noun; one can refer to "a Khoravar airship" or "that silver-tongued Khoravar."

Over the course of centuries, the Khoravar grew in number and spread across the land. Most maintained close ties to their human kin but a few split off to form isolated half-elven communities. These seeds would grow into the Greensingers of the Eldeen Reaches and the Gray Sails of the Lhazaar Principalities. The turning point for the Khoravar was the appearance of the half-elven dragonmarks: the Mark of Storm in Thrane, followed by the Mark of Detection in Breland. In the wake of the War of the Mark and the foundation of Galifar, these houses gave the half-elves a focus for racial pride.

Today, the majority of the Khoravar are attached to House Medani or House Lyrandar. Some remain spread throughout the noble families and guilds of Khorvaire. These half-elves are often called upon to serve as ambassadors and emissaries to Aerenal and Valenar. To date, the full-blooded elves have ruled that a Khoravar cannot join the Undying Court or embody one of the ancestors of the Valenar; the elves acknowledge, however, that the Khoravar blood is stronger than that of the human, and in time a dedicated half-elf may break through this prejudice.

Half-Elven Blood

The genetics of the Khoravar are unusual. Many alchemists and sages are amazed that it is possible for humans and elves to interbreed at all. When a human and half-elf conceive, the resulting child has an equal chance to have the race of either parent. In all other cases -- human and elf, half-elf and half-elf, and elf and half-elf -- the result is always the same: a half-elf child. The Aereni claim that this is not a matter of physiology or genetics, but of magic; the blood of the elves holds the light of ancient Xen'drik, and once diluted it can never be regained. Whether this is true is a matter for each DM to decide.

Khoravar Customs

Half-elves are highly adaptable, drawing on the culture of their families and the nations that they inhabit. Each of the Khoravar dragonmark houses has its own traditions, which will be explored further in the future. A few common customs bind most half-elves together. If you are playing a half-elf character or portraying a half-elf NPC, you must decide whether to make use of these traditions.

Khoravar Cant. If a half-elf is raised by Khoravar parents, he will learn to speak both Common and Elvish. Each new generation of half-elves has a greater tendency to mingle the vocabulary of both languages, creating a pidgin dialect that some linguists refer to as Khoravar Cant. Any half-elf can understand this dialect perfectly. Any other character must make an Intelligence check to understand a phrase in Khoravar Cant (DC 5 if the listener understands both Common and Elvish, or DC 10 if he only knows one of the two languages). If the listener fails the check by a point or two, he may get the gist of the conversation; the worse the roll, the less he understands.

Half-Elven Hospitality. The Khoravar are a young race, and they have had to stand by one another to earn a place in Khorvaire. As a result, there is a strong tradition of hospitality and generosity toward others of the race. This is not as strong as the bond between the gnome families of Zilargo, and a half-elf need not put himself at physical or financial risk for a complete stranger. In comparison to the other races, however, half-elves will go out of their way to help one another and share news and information. This is a two-way street. If the PC develops a reputation as an adventurer or hero, other half-elves may ask for his assistance or advice. If he provides aid, his reputation will spread; if he turns down these requests, he may eventually find himself spurned by others of his

kind.

Within a city or town, half-elves often have weekly gatherings (called *unity meals*) to discuss local news and events. Provided a PC has a good reputation, such a gathering would be an excellent place to learn information. At the DM's discretion, attending a unity meal can provide a character with a bonus to Gather Information or Knowledge (local) or allow the party to find a reliable hireling at a good rate. It can also be a place to learn about possible adventures or mysteries.

The Bridge Between. Many half-elves extend the principle of hospitality a step further, seeking to serve as a bridge between the different cultures of Khorvaire. Many become bards, barristers, diplomats, chroniclers, translators, or merchants. Others become explorers, hoping to discover new nations hidden in the depths of Xen'drik or Khyber.

Questions to Ask

When you create a half-elf PC or NPC, consider the following.

- The Khoravar have a history stretching back to the birth of the race. Were you born into this community or are you a "newborn" -- that is, were your parents half-elves or are you the child of a human and an elf? If you are a newborn, do you want to become a part of the half-elf community or do you want to find your own way in the world?
- Do you have ties to House Medani or House Lyrandar? Because of the age of the race, many Khoravar can trace their roots to one of the families, and even those with no direct tie often choose to ally themselves to one of the houses. This could be reflected by a dragonmark feat or the Favored in House feat, or it could simply be a point of backstory.
- Which tradition do you follow? Are you interested in meeting others and strengthening relations between those around you or do you save your energy for your close friends and family?
- Do you have any interest in your elvish heritage? Do you want to learn the ways of the Aereni or Valenar? Do you hope to join the Undying Court or channel a Valenar ancestor?
- How large is your family? What about the other half-elves in your region? Do you have ties to the local community or are you a loner?

These are notions for consideration, nothing more. Keep them in mind when fashioning your character, but above all, build the character you want to play!

About the Author

Keith Baker has been an avid fan of **Dungeons & Dragons** since grade school. His life took a dramatic turn in 2002 when he submitted the world of Eberron to the WotC Fantasy Setting Search. In addition to developing the **Eberron** Campaign Setting and Shadows of the Last War, he has worked for Atlas Games, Goodman Games, and Green Ronin.

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